

DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, September 15, 2000

A Perfect “A”

By Richard Anderson

What follows is a true story, one that I heard many years ago.

A shepherd living in Wyoming was serenely settled about 80 miles north of Laramie. Every Sunday evening he would listen to the New York Philharmonic broadcast from New York City. This broadcast went coast to coast. The maestro was Arturo Toscanini.

One evening before retiring for the day, the shepherd jotted down a little note to be sent to Toscanini. He explained that his two prize possessions were a tiny transistor radio, used to dial in to the New York Philharmonic, and an old violin. He wrote that his transistor radio's batteries were running low and, although he could get mail delivered, he was not able to make purchases for some time into the future. He anticipated that he would only be able to listen to two more Sunday night broadcasts. In his letter he made a request of the Maestro to play a perfect “A” some time during one of the next two broadcasts. His violin was out of tune and, if this courtesy could be granted, he would be able to tune his violin string to the “A” then after the broadcast he would be able to tune the rest of the violin strings.

During the very next broadcast, after the Philharmonic had played a couple of numbers, Maestro Toscanini came to the microphone and requested that the Symphony play a perfect “A” for the entire nation of broadcast listeners.

Why do I tell you this story? First of all, I like it. Second, it is true. Third, it fits with a major objective that all of us work on every day and that we are focusing on in the Practice Model implementation. Together we work very hard to present to the public we serve an agency that can play a perfect “A” on those critical functions that society expects of us. If we can play a perfect “A” in engaging with people, a perfect “A” in thoroughly assessing, a perfect “A” in planning and intervening, then we can tune the rest of our work to be in harmony with our mission's objectives: protection, permanency, and partnership. Much like a musician, who after knowing the perfect “A” adds a variation that comes from their own unique personal touch, this is what makes a great child welfare worker. Being an expert in the required knowledge and skills (the perfect “A”) and then playing our role in our unique fashion harmonizes our capacity as an agency team to reach people and effect the changes necessary to achieve the expected outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for children.

In training, we send out a note or two and hope that you tune your work appropriately. Like the Maestro, we must send a perfect “A” to all of our staff, partners, children, and families throughout our state, so each of us can tune our work to be most consistent, reliable, and effective.

To Make Your Life Easier...Using SAFE Optimally

By Robert Lewis

Documented Exception is a tool given to supervisors to complete action items for their workers when situations arise where it is impossible for the worker to complete the action item in the regular way. For example, a policy might have changed and SAFE is applying the requirement retroactively to a time when the action was not required, or there is some other approved reason why the requirement is not good for this particular child or family.

Supervisors should use the Action Item "Documented Exception" very sparingly. When considering use of Documented Exception, supervisors should recognize that an overdue action item is a sign that something is likely wrong in the way that an important policy requirement is being carried out or recorded in the case. Doing a Documented Exception may only mask the problem and often will cause more work and problems down the road.

When a Documented Exception is entered, a notice is sent to Region Administration. Document Exception should only have to be used occasionally. If a particular supervisor is choosing to do massive numbers of Documented Exceptions, this may be a clue that administrative intervention is needed. Perhaps the supervisor or workers on the team need some more training on how to use SAFE effectively. Or there may need to be some changes in procedures in the office to make the work flow less awkward. As always, the SAFE team is available to help in the solution.